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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND DRL JBARGHOUT

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: A VICTORY FOR CHILD BRIDES: PARLIAMENT (FINALLY)
RAISES THE MARRIAGE AGE

¶1. With strong opposition from Islah, Parliament voted on February 14 to approve a marriage law setting the minimum age of marriage at 17 for men and women. The law also stipulates that no woman of any age can be married without her consent. Parents violating the law face imprisonment for up to a year or a fine of approximately \$500 USD. A 1992 law set the minimum legal age of marriage at 15, but it was revoked by Parliament in 1998 under pressure from religious conservatives. Until now, multiple attempts to reinstate a minimum age for marriage failed in Parliament. Islah campaigned against the amendment until the final vote, and Islah MP Mohamed al-Hazme distributed a brochure in Parliament stating that raising the minimum age of marriage was in contradiction to Islamic law and should not be tolerated.

¶2. In 2008, several high-profile "child brides" (some under the age of 10) drew attention to the phenomenon of early marriage in Yemen, where the average age of marriage for girls in rural areas is 12 or 13. Shada Nasser, a human rights lawyer who represented some of the child brides in their divorce cases, told PolOff on February 18, "I am happy with the law. It is good, but it's not enough." She explained that the ROYG needed to go further with marriage law, including a provision requiring the marriage contract to be signed in court rather than at home, which would provide the woman with greater legal protection.

COMMENT

¶3. Passage of the new marriage law represents an important step forward for protecting the rights of Yemen's children. In a society where tradition and social custom often take precedence over the law, however, the practical impact will remain minimal without awareness campaigns and a sustained effort to change societal beliefs. END COMMENT.
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